

3 June 1972

Dear Harold:

Your first class of May 30 came in yesterday, and in the meantime a few things have appeared which you should have and which are enclosed.

Gervais appears to be slowly making his way back toward NO. Like you, the tax gripe sounds inadequate here as an explanation of why he's returning to what is being made to appear as a possible trap, in view of the talk about a hit contract for him. We've seen nothing in any paper outside NO since the first stories, although admittedly we haven't worked over the NY Times yet except for the latest on Bremer. Will watch carefully for anything further.

Regarding Bremer, I find an uncomfortable parallel between his case and that of Narvey McCleod, the young black who shot up the shopping center May 29 at Raleigh, ~~NC~~ N.C. Both were strange characters, lonely, and both were janitors in school buildings where the custom is to work at night and where surreptitious contacts are easily possible. There is no sensible motive in either case. As to McCleod, we heard on radio the same day there had been a racial disturbance elsewhere in N.C. either the same day or the day before, and never saw anything about it in the local press. Apparently no connection as a trigger for McCleod, since he might not even have heard about it and the police say he shot at blacks as well as whites.

And believe it or not, I find also possible parallels and links between the Sirhan case, that of Bremer, and the gory shootout at Tel Aviv airport on May 30 by the three Japanese gunmen, allegedly hired by Arabs. While there is a long tradition of political assassination in Japan, this would be the first time to my knowledge that it has been exported and ~~expanded~~ expanded into a general bloodbath such as that at Tel Aviv. In other words, the Japanese are among the least likely to hire out for a job like this outside their own country where their own internal political motives are not involved.

There is one factor in their cultural heritage which could help to explain their action. This is the so-called ronin tradition. The ronin were hired warriors during feudal Japan who swore fealty to any of the various shoguns, or regional warlords, and did their bidding as long as the agreement was lived up to by the overlord. Their knightly duties included assassinations, raids and the like, all under a code known as bushido which was an ethical mishmash roughly comparable with that of the knights of the round table in mediaeval England. Aside from the bushido nonsense, there was NO ~~xxx~~ intellectual, ideological or other political element involved. They were simply hired men, paid warriors, and apparently did not hesitate, if their master failed to hold up his end of the bargain, to go over to another side, sign a new contract, and fight just as enthusiastically for the new boss. The important thing about the whole scene is that the ronin is to the Japanese what the knights of the round table were to succeeding generations of the English, and such stories as the Tale of the 47 Ronin occupy a comparable place in Japanese legend and literature. In China during the Japanese occupation, the term ronin came to be applied to Japanese civilian adventurers who tagged along behind the conquering Imperial Army and who filled precisely the role of the carpetbagger. The army used them often for jobs it didn't want to handle itself.

However it is one thing for a Japanese draft dodger to make his way to Manchuria or occupied China and pick up a few fast bucks doing dirty work for the army of occupation, including the spreading and sale of heroin among the Chinese; it is quite a different stretch of the imagination to envision today's young Japanese radical knowingly allowing himself to be dragged into the Arab-Israeli dispute so far away from home and in a cause so remote from the domestic Japanese issues which made him a radical in the first place. I say some factor was at work here which has not even been hinted at. There is nothing I know of in the Japanese character to explain the ~~savagery~~ savagery of the Tel Aviv attack on what had to be totally impersonal targets. It is not untypical, of course, that given the fact the trio found themselves in this situation, one would destroy himself and even kill a comrade with the gunfire he was spraying around so insanely. I'm not alone in my puzzlement. The Japanese in Japan appear profoundly shocked by the whole thing, so much so that it's not entirely explainable on the basis of national pride and shame. They know the ronin tradition better than I do, and although they haven't even mentioned it as far as I know, must be painfully conscious that never before has it been exported so far and to a milieu totally unrelated to Japan.

I cannot forget that this is ascribed to Arab money -- one might even guess that it could have been a preliminary smokescreen for the nationalization of the oil industry in Iraq which followed by a day or two. But this does not explain how Arabs could PERSUADE three Japanese to do such a desperate, untypical thing.

This recalls the Arab whom Jerry Owens thought was the nationality of the extremely well-dressed man he saw with Sirhan and who he thought was more or less in charge. Owens was very positive and obviously much impressed with this man. Owens might have been lying about 90 per cent of the rest of his story, but I am quite sure he was bowled over by the expensive nature of this man's attire. And of course a well-dressed man has been mentioned as having been seen with Bremer during his ferry crossings, and although described as Greek, easily could also have been Arab. (1968.)

By the way, the Owens tape you describe appears to be that of another interview with Owens. Mine was made June 29, at George T. Davis' ranch in Napa County, with Davis and a local minuteman type named Ben Hardister who was acting as a sort of bodyguard to Owens, who at the time felt himself under threat. I recall that Bill Turner later had an interview with Owens, but can't recall having heard the tape of it.

As for my tape, it's a poor recording and it's very hard to tell how much of what Owens says has any relation to fact. However he obviously was scared at the time, and although he talked for nearly an hour, said little which should interest you now. If you wish, I can dub it for you, but believe it would be a waste of your time.

To answer one of your notes, I've not heard of Richard Neely. The name rings no bells. Like you, I lean toward a pen name.

Some time ago, when you first mentioned the Billiken Courier, we tried to find it, couldn't, and then tried to order it. Nothing happened. If you could give us the name of the author we'll try again.

That's all for now, best,

 jdw